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ABSTRACT

The issue of updating teacher education to improve approach and attitude is discussed from the viewpoint of one professor. It is suggested that emphasis should be placed on improving an instructor's "transfer ability," by improving his capacity to build interest among students--causing their greater willingness to receive and their greater retention through interest generated. Suggestions are offered for teacher improvement through classroom presence, style, vocabulary, humor, simplicity, and specificity. Classroom examples are given and a short bibliography is included. (LBH)

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THE CLASSROOM AS A BATTLEFIELD

OR

HOW LACK OF INTEREST CREATES A COUNTER-CULTURE

by

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Depending on whose criticism you read, Higher Education is either depicted as being in terrible shape, going completely to the dogs, or it is believed to be slightly improving since the hectic days of the sixties when the Vietnamese War had completely destroyed the younger generation's confidence; in either case it still needs to be channelled into the right direction.

Whichever attitude we endorse, there is no doubt that much remains to be done to improve the image of today's colleges and the esteem in which its professors and other instructors happen to find themselves.[1] Even those students who seem anxious to learn, normally agree that things are rather dull on the campus, and one uninspired lecture follows another until the entire curriculum has been "covered" somehow or other. What can be done to alleviate this boredom which indubitably is the strongest enemy of truly appealing educational patterns? How

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[1] James R. David, Teaching Strategies for the College Classroom (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1976).

can this issue be tackled?

The author of this article will present his own ideas, at the same time demonstrating that similar statements have indeed been made during the past few years by many experts, although somehow their efforts did not make as much furor as certain other ideas of considerable smaller importance. The issue is simply how to update teacher education--not by making our instructors into memory experts who will tomorrow try to bring up another generation of teachers who know all details about American History, Chemistry or French Civilization, but by improving their approach and attitude, attempting to turn them into educators who like their students and for whom their students care enough to "lend them their ears." For without student interest, all that precious time and effort in the classroom are wasted. You want to find out just how dull a lecture can be? According to veteran author Irving Wallace, co-author of The Book of Lists, the "boredom rating" of a professor is 49, just a few titles away from that of a machine assembly worker and a delivery service courier.[2] If the instructor finds his own work so stultifying, can we be surprised if his students are bored to death?

The above facts can simply be condensed in the following words: Among the many important problems discussed by today's academicians, there is one that deserves greater attention: that of training Instructors-to-be, and re-training tenured professors,

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[2]Judson Hand, "The Flying Wallechinskys: Or, the Family That Writes Together, Reaps Together," Daily News, Tuesday, May 10, 1977, p. 31.

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in the skill of developing interest among their students. An observation made by R. Wolfe in the late sixties about the confrontation between the university and its students still holds good.

> Faced with what may be a monolithic university structure and a hierarchical administration opposed to the values of the counter-culture, students act desperately to seek redress for their grievances and salvation, however symbolic, for the perilously threatened bio-sphere.[3]

Administrators and staff members abhor the thought of supervising teachers in the sense the American Medical Association and American Bar Association monitors their members. Our College Instructors simply will not offer inspiration that improves individual and group instruction capacity. Administrators omit recruiting the upper 10 percent of college graduates for teaching jobs, letting them slip away to other positions. Both administrators and faculties ignore the fact their students can be no better than those people they hire to instruct. A cavalier attitude to say the least. Most pet owners choose a veterinarian with greater care than some institutions hire instructors.

Now, whether some of the starchy, degree-laden administrators and instructors agree or not, the time has come to borrow stage, screen, and television techniques that generate interest

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[3]H. R. Wolf, "Personal Teaching: A Discussion," College English, Vol. 33, No. 3, December, 1971, p. 259.

among students of all ages. All the present dither about student evaluations is beside the point. "Nothing ever happens as a result of our evaluations," is the standard student observation at most colleges and institutions.

Schlater hit it on the head when writing: "If instructional in-school television is to make its impact, its producers must be willing to utilize some of the formats and production techniques of commercial broadcasters in order to compete for attention of the student audience."[4]

The above statement simply means, on a higher plateau, that if we want types and areas of instruction ever to improve, they must be able to generate interest among students. Most students today confirm they consider themselves adversaries of Instructors. By implication they prefer an array of culturally enriched, interesting, problem-oriented experiences within the customary 10-week quarter's framework. This type of innovation sees Instructor and students as explorers sharing interest in a search for solutions to problems. Once able to generate and amintain interest, Instructors then help develop a spirit of unity within diversity; they generate interest in learning by teaching "not what to learn, but how to learn, and not what they should be committed to, but the value of commitment."[5]

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[4]R. Schlater, "Effect of Speed of Presentation on Recall of Television Messages," Journal of Broadcasting, 1970, 12(2), pp. 207-214.

[5]Mead, Anthony M., "The Way We Learn", AV Communications Review 18 (1970), p. 72.

The Instructor may know more about a given subject, but when it comes to the approach, the tables could easily be turned. Some students could properly teach the mechanics to the Instructor.

Schlater's cogent observation is amply supported by two aphorisms: "There are no dull subjects, only dull Instructors," and "The entertainer addresses himself to an audience, but the artist creates an audience."

Professors should stop relying on degrees and past learning. The time has come to be concerned about an Instructor's improving his transfer ability by improving his capacity to build interest among students--causing their greater willingness to receive, and their greater retention through interest generated. Reliance on expressive educational resources is also useless. Here is what P. D. Mitchell has to say on this waste of funds:

> If typical--and costly--university instructional methods are no more effective than none at all, we confront a theoretical and practical dilemma. Students are necessary and perhaps sufficient for effective instruction; instructors are unnecessary. Are students mistaken in abdicating responsibility for their education (and administrators in seeking student evaluation of teaching)? Do universities misallocate valuable human and financial resources and waste everyone's time? How can effective instructional communications and activities be prepared and made available to students?[6]

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[6]P. David Mitchell, "Can Computer Simulation Improve the Effectiveness of College Teaching?" Educational Technology, Vol. 13, No. 12, December, 1973, p. 15.

Classroom Presence

Basic to an Instructor's presence is the fact that the more story appeal he offers, the more appealing is he likely to be. A story? Sure. When he walks into the classroom for the first time does he suggest he may have been the sixth Boy Scout over the South Pole during Admiral Byrd's exploratory years there? Does he extend the comforting arms of a parent who years ago told this story: "Once upon a time. . .?" Does he suggest animated conversations in a Paris bistro near Communist headquarters? Does he actually try to transfer knowledge by making people virtually itch to find out more, to pay attention, to become interested, to retain? Is his approach antagonistic to students' points-of-view? Does the instructor interact well with the younger generation? Is he tolerant of a broad spectrum of youthful pursuits: drugs, booze, sex? Or does he shush-up such issues, shoving them impatiently under the rug? Does he work hard at modernizing his subject, using up-to-date images, idioms, easily recognized examples? All of this leads to student involvement, as opposed to indolence. All of this results in a key development: emancipation of students from fear, and development of the opposite attitud: attention, interest, and retention.

There's an saying that applies: "You can't save souls in an empty church." So it is with the classroom: "You can't educate without students' attention, interest, and retention."

The basic plank then in restructuring one's classroom presence lies in understanding those values today's students live by, their life styles. And today, students are full of emotion; waiting to be channeled into constructive know-how.

As a result, improved classroom instruction calls for factual presentation, emotionally clothed. This latter condition suggests something must happen to the Instructor so he becomes interesting, electric, magnetic--so a dramatic, arresting quality emanates from ins presence.

To sum up: what an Instructor does in the classroom is just as important as what he says.

Putting it another way: it's important an Instructor gets down to his students' intellectual and emotional levels. Remember they sit there passively, doubting, perhaps bored, even fearful. Once at their level, the Instructor dares not just tell, he's got to show. By showing, he finds it easier to ram home the message.

Most European instruction, and about 95% of United States teaching, is lecture-and-test, stiff, cumbersome, wordy. The French term for such rigid instruction is l'enseignement magistrale--teaching teachers for the purpose of teaching. But Les Folies Bergere, L'Opera, and La Comédie Francaise are what really attract. Aren't they animated, sometimes of the Lewis Carroll caliber, yet culturally significant? Something came over the words when Chaucer, Keats, and Eliot wrote their stuff. Their

expressions carry heightened images and connotations. Something must come over the individual Instructor and his words if he's to improve his classroom presence. Simple questioning indicates most students would like to really communicate with their Instructor; they want him to be personal in his transmission. Quiet perhaps, but dignified, magnetic, of the quality that gets under one's skin to itch pleasantly. Here is how learners are reported to appreciate stimulating instruction methods:

> Feedback from them unanimously indicates that with the inclusion of such a responsibility format they feel education and learning to be alive, exciting, and valuable. They deserve such action in the classroom and find its nourishment immensely meaningful.[7]

Style

There are three fundamentals: style, simplicity, and specificity. Deliberately planned and well executed, these fundamentals give any Instructor's classroom presence the feel of motion. They build an electric quality into presence and delivery. Most important of these is style. It means that the entire class reflects an Instructor's concern, his caring-about-students attitude. From style students come to recognize an Instructor's authority, his interest-building capacity, their own improved

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[7]Gary S. Felton, "Accountability in Teaching," Education Vol. 95, No. 1, Fall, 1974, p. 30.

understading, and their better retention. An Instructor should learn to change his voice so he delivers dangerous tones, dancing tones, and blazing tones. He needs a specific vocabulary and a sprinkling of humor students identify with and enjoy. Examples:

Vocabulary:
"Hey, man!"
"Perhaps we can all get out of here today early."
"You're all in the right groove, keep up the good work."
"Darned good question, Mr. Jones. Did you all hear it?"
"Have a good week-end. See you next Monday."
"I'd welcome you in any of my classes."
"You look plenty smart to me; you're just not using all your smarts."
"Let's take a vacation; no assignment this week-end."
"Mr. White, if you feel I'm imposing on you, mark that question correct."

Humor:
"Good morning, Mr. Jones (AS LATE STUDENT ENTERS). So good of you to come to class."
"Ms. Smith chewed me out for holding the class over-time yesterday. I'm afraid to keep you any longer."
"Oh, oh! Ms. Brown is putting on her coat. Time to go!"
"Let's say Ms. Black leaves here in another ten minutes (PROF LOOKS AT HIS WATCH). She's tired of listening to me talk, so she goes to the nearest bar for a bottle of beer. Now she begins to study. . ." (BE SURE TO SELECT THE MOST DEMURE GIRL IN THE CLASS, OR THE PRETTIEST"

Justification for changing and improving your teaching style lies all around. Movie attendance is at an all-time high. Attendance at baseball games is growing as baseball ownership offers its wares more and more at night--tailored to life styles. Students listen to radio and watch television about 5 hours daily. We live in an era of motion, entertainment, enjoyment, competition,

color, heightened style, creativity, outstanding abilities to build electric vibrations that penetrate the watchers' and listeners' emotional apparatus. All this despite the outcome, score, or result.

Competition from electronic circuitry and diversified entertainment is so great the starchy, degree-laden, lecturing Instructor dares no longer ignore this shift in values.

McLuhan was correct. We do live in a world of instantaneity. There is little patience displayed by most youth today, the patience, that is, to cram through years of acquiring knowledge and the customary academic rewards. If we want to corrorate this need for charging instructional method in the words of a less radical author, here is J. R. Davis' statement.

> Teachers who take into account the way the mind works will be far more effective than those who just stand up and talk. Lecturing is part art but mostly science. Those who employ lecturing as a teaching strategy need to recognize it for what it is, a highly complex mode of transmitting and receiving information. For most college teachers, lecturing is like throwing the shot; They spend all their time getting together a very heavy message and then they just fling it. Lecturing, in fact, is more like throwing a frisbee: The message has to be thrown in such a way that it can be caught and with some reasonable expectation that it can be returned.[8]

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[8] Davis, op. cit., p. 57.

Simplicity

Calculus, chemistry, and the Arabic language cannot necessarily be further simplified. There is a certain grinding effort required to master these subjects for, most of us, except a real genius. But enrollees studying such specific subjects are motivated differently than the ones this article refers to. Degrees of describing, presenting, and analyzing can be built into any old subject thus:

	THE IMAGE	HOW DELIVERED
1.	"I gave him a thrashing."	said matter-of-factly, a generality
2.	"I delivered an uppercut."	simpler, said with some pride, shows greater skill
3.	"I gave him a solid uppercut to the chin."	more definite
4.	"I gave him a 10-pound uppercut with my right fist."	begins to glow with details and evaluative quality
5.	"I gave him a knock-out blow to the chin with my right fist."	now quite specific
6.	"Uppercut with right hand--bye bye--to his chin--he hit the deck."	
7.	"The 'ole sleeperoo--bye bye!"	slang, quickly understood the dramatic, the efficient, the simple achieved through slang

In Madison Avenue's world of motion there's a phrase that states specifically what an Instructor is trying to do: ". . . beguile with simplicity." This is Neiman-Marcus copy, Bloomingdale's excitement, the sparkling, jiggling quality of Mozart's Nachtmusik, the modernity of lines by poets Tom Gunn and e. e. cummings. There is a capacity, an art perhaps, to building images. In marketing

there's the term heuristic. Heuristic marketing offers images or demonstrations that persuade and compel rather than presenting dry, logical arguments. The professor who teaches marketing can bring this down to a simple concept: bias/persuasion vs. logical/factual. But does he? Not as a rule. Students complain about having to look up meanings of terms like these they believe the Instructor should have simplified for them. Yes, sometimes a simple definition or illustration may show that the Instructor cares! A study conducted at Pennsylvania State University confirms that sometimes excellent results may be achieved by amply using a better illustration.

> The results of this evaluation indicate that the use of illustrations to complement oral instruction is an effective way to improve achievement of those specific educational objectives that are measured by the drawing, identification, and total criterial tests.[9]

Specificity

Student complaints over the quality of teaching come principally from those in liberal arts, not in the sciences. After all, physics, astronomy, chemistry and engineering subjects are specific. But the open areas in so many liberal arts courses give rise to wobbly understandings. It's the gray areas in which teaching difficulties arise. This is partly due to a generation

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[9]Francis M. Dwyer, "Student Perceptions of the Instructional Effectiveness of Black & White and Colored Illustrations," Journal of Experimental Education, Vol. 40, No. 1, Fall, 1971, p. 33.

gap, partly to lack of teaching skill. For example, there's no way an Instructor can communicate with a demographic entity; he's got to communicate individually and personally. And why this is so difficult over a quarter's period of ten weeks with only 25-30 students in a class, is not quite clear, even though communicative principles explain it.

Instructors rarely tell students anything startling; they just get students to think about information they already possess to some extent. This, despite Max Weber's having said: "It's the duty of the teacher to bring up inconvenient facts." Therefore, an Instructor is liable to confirm preconceptions, and suffer communicative failure. But one doesn't think about a Cadillac the same way he thinks about a Pepsi-Cola. One doesn't teach building with Tinker Toys as he teaches building with chemical elements. The message has to be true, it must at least appear true, on students' terms, not just in the Instructor's head. It's got to appear true on the basis of what students already know,. Housewives and students do not believe hot dogs offer more protein than does steak. They can't be shaken on this conviction. Their beliefs are frequently as rigid as those on politics and religion; these are absolutes. There is no room for maneuvering. But, it is possible to discuss and illustrate a life style with which a student audience can identify. In short, facts deny spirit and soul in teaching, but this is what being a professor is all about. It's adding extra values, extra

dimensions, extra perception, extra insights students otherwise can't perceive. Let us repeat what E. A. Campbell has to say:

> Let's face fact. Colleges and universities must break traditional lecture patterns. For the most part our elementary and secondary schools are teaching students are more efficiently and effectively and are farther ahead in teaching methods. They are using varied size groups and instructional media.10

Example after example shows insurance companies tend to dramatize the danger, i.e., fire, destitution, hospital costs, etc., when all the prospect wants is security against these dangers. These companies must dramatize their help if and when it's needed.

With students it is quite similar. They sit there, each one perhaps unlike the other, distrustful, fearful, insecure, eager to recognize a familiar framework, hopefully with some improvements that offer added personal security and accomplishment. Each has developed his own individual collection of interconnected beliefs as urban life, rural life, or a wretched home life that may have shaped them. Unhappily, a belief is often not factual, and beliefs vary in intensity from student to student, i.e., self, survival, justice, a god, motherhood, love, sex, booze, animals. Out of these real and unreal beliefs comes a student's behavior. Beliefs are better recognized by slang: hang-ups, a "flakey" person, a mixed-up kid, etc. Everybody has these

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[10]Edward A. Campbell, College Management, Vol. 8, No. 8, October, 1973, p. 8.

things and they're often in conflict, surging around our inside painfully. From the total assembly of these prejudices and passions comes classroom action and reaction. However, it's the bigger and better beliefs, those more dynamic in nature, installed by persons of authority, traumatically perhaps, that rise to dominance and control behavior.

To influence students' behavior, the ultimate goal in education, the Instructor must alter beliefs. To achieve this, the Instructor must offer his students opportunities for re-examination. Hopefully, the teacher undergoes the same process: re-evaluation and new conclusions.

While dong this, the Instructor must necessarily play poker; he bets on two, three, four, perhaps five face cards, identified in any classroom as common denominators. The denominators are different for an all-white student class than for a mixed or all-black class. He draws these from his bag of professional teaching techniques and applies them skillfully. These common denominators, when played consistently over a 10-week period, do influence a majority of students because they continually massage, bump, bounce-off, re-shape, and finally alter beliefs. The Instructor scrutinizes his students to determine need and ability; he determines "what to say" and "how to say it," all based on the various beliefs and attitudes inside students.

Usually the Instructor can start by knowing student are full of emotion. They're distorted, they may believe such things

as: "All profs are big memorizers; they don't really know;" "They teach their own crap;" "I hate profs, my 8-B math teacher slapped my face once." And so on. The Instructor, then, must deal mainly with student rationalizations, irrational concepts, passions, prejudiced, a few facts, and many bits of misinformation.[11]

Such a welter of distressed, jumbled, and distorted elements tend to overwhelm some Instructors. But patiently, the Instructor feels he'll get active behavior from some students inside his classroom as he shows electric performance that strikes some beliefs sympathetically; he knows he'll get a sullen reaction from some students as his electric performance strikes their beliefs harshly. But whether <u>active</u> or <u>non-active</u>, the Instructor hopes for <u>internally favorable behavior</u> which includes enjoying, laughing evaluating, rejecting, accepting, associating, testing, using, adopting. He hopes for a favorable mixing with existing beliefs, those accepted beliefs sufficiently secure at least to examine and test what he's proposing.

Ultimately, the Instructor hopes that his messages, his insistence, and his delivery will cause change. He convinces, he persuades, he irritates. To give himself the best poker hand possible, he uses many techniques from his professional teaching bag: tone of voice, single and double windmill motions, humor,

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[11]Wolf, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 363.

eyeball contact, noise, friendship, authority, research, his own intellect--all sorts of things--many pitched directly to students' basic beliefs in sex, booze, food, specialized hobbies, entertainment, music, clothing--and finally, education. Get the students involved! Make them participate, and they will develop a healthy interest.

> If education--let us say the teaching of English poetry or black literature--is to be a process ever renewing itself and not a product pre-packaged in our lecture notes of ten years earlier, why shouldn't teachers use the happening as a process tool in the classroom, instead of smiling tolerantly as they did at the beginning of its growth? As Mac Luhan suggests, the more the student supplies from himself, the greater his involvement in the learning experience, . . .[12]

The professional Instructor realizes that during a 10-week quarter he must mix a whole host of factors. He plays many cards during this poker game: deuces, jacks, aces, eights, fives. . .he offers his mix electrically and appealingly to the students' sensory apparatus: eyes, ears, mouth, nose, skin. They accept, and help in the process of mixing new ideas and concepts with older beliefs. The professional Instructor is confident his students will be affected by many little things: his flashing confidence, his enthusiasm, his salesmanship, his premier performances day after day, his entertainment, his dramatic quality, his humor, his techniques, his magnetism, his skill in

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[12]Leo Hamalian and James V. Hatch, "How to Turn the Hip Generation on to Shelley and Keats," College English, Vol. 33, No. 3, December, 1971, p. 325.

building interest in himself, his understanding, his friendliness, his subject matter.

"It's a continuous process class period after class period as the Instructor's performance has varying degrees of impact on those beliefs he's trying to re-order into improved understanding and behavior. His eternal obligation is to alter student beliefs into more powerful and better ordered, relevant and applicable circumstances through the example of his own intellect and his classroom performance."

Today's students, full of emotion, need patient attention to their fundamental beliefs, some of which may be terribly jumbled. They need someone to build their self-concept, someone who esteems them, someone who endures their mistakes and cheers them on. Someone who delivers knowledge and renews knowledge in style, with simplicity, but specifically. In short, someone who likes students, and cares.

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